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From 'Hip Hop Revolutionaries' to 'Terrorist-Thugs': 'Blackwashing' between the Arab Spring and the War on Terror

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ABSTRACT Rayya El Zein takes up a global analysis of how ideas of blackness, whiteness, and Arabness circulate in post-9/11 media accounts and argues that these concepts work to mediate Western understanding of politics in the Arab world. El Zein unpacks the paradox by which blackwashing is differentially deployed to mark certain Arab subjects as a "good rapper" or a "bad rapper," and how both of these valences serve to expand neoliberal orientalism through the political familiarity promised by blackness. As an alternative, El Zein suggests attention to the material, historical, and geographic specificities of the power struggles that structure racial capitalism, classism, and racism, especially and essential because of their potential international unrecognizability.



Trailer of the film *Slingshot Hip Hop* (dir. Jackie Salloum, 2008)

The opening shot in the trailer of Jackie Salloum's documentary *Slingshot Hip Hop* invites the viewer to identify with its Palestinian protagonists by aligning them with a specific iteration of urban life and political expression. The trailer begins with an interview with Tamer Nafar, of the Palestinian rap group DAM. Nafar holds Public Enemy's 1990 album *Fear of a Black Planet* and he says, "Look how great this title is: *Fear of a Black Planet*. It's about how the white man is trying to stop the growth of the Black population. In this country, there's fear of an Arabic Nation." The trailer thus introduces the film's protagonists through a specific racial triangulation. It invites the viewer to understand the experiences of Palestinians under Occupation through the iconic lens of the expression of the struggle of black Americans in a white US. Translating Palestinian frustration under Zionist Occupation in this way encourages the viewer to make a set of associations about Palestinian oppression, struggle, and tactics. In this essay, I interrogate the racial

representations through which Arab rappers are constructed and circulated in different forms of English language media and the political implications of these representations. In doing so, I attempt to draw into focus the window which often frames Arab protagonists for an audience outside the Arab world.

Slingshot Hip Hop is a documentary film about Palestinians making and performing rap music under the Israeli Occupation. It follows different rap crews from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and inside Israel as they attempt to and are obstructed from taking the stage in one concert in the occupied West Bank. The film was released in 2008 and is screened regularly on US college campuses. DAM, one of the Palestinian groups featured prominently in the film, arguably put Palestinian hip hop on a global map—their tracks and collaborations have perhaps done more than any single other Arab rap crew on the Eastern Mediterranean to draw global attention to Arabic rap from the Levant. They are Palestinians from the neglected city of Lyd, inside Israel. DAM's lyrics and tracks have been celebrated internationally as voices of young Palestinians resisting the Occupation. This continues to be the case despite the questionable politics some have critiqued in examples of the group's more recent work.¹

Interesting here are not the merits of the *Slingshot Hip Hop* as a film, which by and large works well, especially to introduce US audiences unfamiliar with the realities of the Occupation to a Palestinian perspective, so often missing from media depictions of the Palestinian-Israeli "conflict." Nor are my concerns here a close reading of the aesthetic or political merits of DAM's musical work, which, like that of any artistic collaboration, has produced some memorable and some less than memorable ventures. Rather, what I want to highlight here is that the use of Nafar's testimony in the opening clip of the trailer is symptomatic of a larger phenomenon that triangulates simplistic representations of "whiteness," "blackness," and "Arabness" in order to construct easily readable analogies of politics in the Arab world for non-Arab audiences.

Arab Youth through the Lens of Hip Hop

In the full interview in the film, Nafar's comments about Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet* are much more ambivalent than they are in the trailer. The trailer seemingly presents a direct link, in the Palestinian rapper's perspective, between urban struggle against racism in the US and Palestinian struggle under Occupation. In the film, the camera follows Nafar as he lists the DAM's musical and lyrical influences. He actually tells the viewer that he was not aware of and had not listened to Public Enemy (besides the track "Fight the Power" in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*) before listeners made the connection for him. Only then did he look for and find the album *Fear of a Black Planet*. As the scene in *Slingshot* progresses, Nafar rifles through a bookshelf full of Palestinian poetry and then he "breaks down what DAM is." It is "30 percent hip hop," and 30 percent the other literature he's been pointing to (Edward Said, Mahmoud Darwish, Tupac Shakur, Naji el-Ali, Ahlam Mestaghanmi, Nawal Al-Sadawi, Nizar Qabbani, Hanan Al-Sheikh). The final 40 percent, he explains, is "what's out there," indicating beyond the bars of his window: that is, the Occupation.

It is too simplistic to suggest that the trailer is somehow complicit in a misrepresentation of what Nafar explains in more detail in the film. Rather, in distilling a direct, simplified correlation between African American experience in a white US as related in *Fear of a Black Planet* to the experiences of Palestinians under Occupation, the trailer mobilizes, to the film's advertising benefit, an immediately attractive and sympathetic way to understand Arab political struggle for an English language audience. What makes this worthy of more extended analysis is that this trailer is not an isolated example.

Considerable activist and academic energy since the second Intifada has sought to draw connections between the anti-racist struggles of African Americans in the US and Palestinians under occupation, many of them using the presence of hip hop as proof of this affinity and solidarity.² To be sure, this work has, among other things, sought to unseat the dominant narrative of the violent, repressed Palestinian as “terrorist” in Western media. Neither is this enthusiasm about the taking up of hip hop only applied to Palestinian subjects.

Dozens of articles appeared in the exciting first weeks of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions in 2011 that similarly sought and explored the creative connections between US hip hop and Arab street protest. The BBC asked, for example, “Is Hip Hop Driving the Arab Spring?” and NPR affirmatively answered, “Tupac Encouraged the Arab Spring.”³ How can we explain the enthusiasm to understand some politically vocal Arab youth through the lens of hip hop? Why has the connection with this interpretation of African-American urban life and political expression proved such a saleable and important connection in framing some Palestinian and other urban Arab perspectives?

These questions quickly become more complicated than a few problematic journalistic forays into the “cultural production” of the Arab Spring. For example, political scientist Hisham Aidi has convincingly explored the deliberate exploitation of African American political and musical expression by the US State Department in cultural programming geared for the Muslim world in the wake of the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal.⁴ In marketing Muslim-American rap groups to Middle Eastern and Central Asian audiences deemed susceptible to the advance of Islamist fundamentalism, the State Department (in collaboration with the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Jazz at Lincoln Center) put together the Rhythm Road Tours. These concerts sent Muslim American rappers overseas to perform both their music, and their full assimilation into the US’s tolerant, multi-cultural fabric.⁵

Aidi underscores how US state representations of Malcom X as civil rights’ hero accompanied the Rhythm Road Tour’s cultural outreach to win the hearts and minds worryingly estranged by the occupation of Iraq and the damning behavior of US servicemen and women abroad. Aidi calls this cultural programming (which included whitewashed representations of Malcom X’s history and politics) attempts to “blackwash” the US’s image abroad. That is, the tours are an example of neoliberal frameworks of representation that, in working to counter the negative backlash against neo-imperial policy, present images of African-American struggle for equality and history in the US as ideally American. This works because, as Mustafa Bayoumi explains, “What is more American today, after all, than African-American?”⁶ While the political aims of the Rhythm Road Tours are quite different from the coverage of hip hop during the Arab Spring and Salloum’s *Slingshot Hip Hop*, the mobilization of a racial imaginary that uses hip hop as a lens through which to access Arab or Muslim youth is strikingly similar.

Another documentary film about hip hop in the Arab world that closely reflects the politics of the Rhythm Road Tours is Joshua Asen and Jennifer Needleman’s *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco* (2005). Like *Slingshot*, it also follows the lead-up to live hip hop concerts. As an inversion of the Rhythm Road forays in “hip hop diplomacy,” American student Joshua Asen considered that sponsoring local Arab hip hop artists would have essentially the same effect as exporting American hip hop artists to the Arab world. Asen helped organize, and then with Needleman filmed, a “three-city hip hop festival” in Morocco. The success of the venture was described by the Cultural Affairs Officer at the US Embassy in Morocco: “Everything was positive and we got no negative feedback... There were American flags at all three concerts that spontaneously appeared—right side up and not on fire.”⁷ Asen added, “I’m saying flip it, sponsor American art as it’s being reinterpreted

by locals, you get infinitely more mileage out of that.” Hip hop, he concludes is “a democratic message, all about free speech and self-expression, and directly in line with US policy.”⁸

In US state efforts to reach Arab audiences through hip hop, both the whitewashing of the legacy of American hip hop (by aligning it with US state policy) and blackwashing of the US abroad (by associating it with popular music like hip hop) become clear.⁹ Ideas about the political impact of hip hop are used as shorthand towards Arab and Muslim youth and their political aspirations, while the political critique of capitalism and imperialism in strains of US hip hop are absorbed by the state and neutralized.

The mobilizations of ideas of “blackness” in carefully edited representations of Malcom X’s political legacy; the presentation of hip hop as an intrinsically American expressive strategy to “speak truth to power”; the media coverage of hip hop during the Arab Spring; and the framework in the *Slingshot Hip Hop* trailer all mobilize the same racial imagination. While Asen’s film and the Rhythm Road Tours use ideas about hip hop to soften the US’s image, the *Slingshot* trailer and coverage of protest and rap use familiar ideas about rappers “speaking truth to power” to make familiar Palestinians and other Arab protesters. These are potentially very different political ideas. But they rely on essentially the same racialized constructions. In a time of increased interest in black-Arab solidarity organizing, I consider it worthwhile to examine carefully the navigations of similarity and difference that these political abstractions of race mobilize. That is, I am concerned with how ideas of “whiteness,” “blackness,” and “Arabness”—as racialized frameworks that carry with them simplified notions of the politics or political struggles of various populations—establish who and what is “political” and whether or not these “politics” are desirable or loathsome in neoliberal discourse. If “whiteness,” as cultural studies scholars have deliberated for decades, stands in for the universalizing, normative ideal, “blackness,” in my formulation here, stands in for a range of contrast with and to “whiteness” which is alternatively folded into or cast as outside of the neoliberal body public.¹⁰ These representative frameworks are used to make sense of “Arabness.” In addition to identifying that these racial caricatures exist, the point for me here is to interrogate how these racial caricatures assist the construction of neoliberal politics and policy. The proximity and distance that representations of “whiteness,” “blackness,” and “Arabness” navigate are importantly productive gestures that specifically inform neoliberal subjectivity and ideas of ideal political expression, *while* they parrot polite and predictably racist and orientalist ideas about both black and Arab experiences.

Blackwashing and the Liberal Imagination

Looking at associations of hip hop with particular political subjects in specifically politicized contexts help to tease out what Asian and Critical Ethnic Studies scholars Jasbir Puar, Rey Chow, and Susan Koshy identify as the “ascendancy of whiteness” in multicultural discourses.¹¹ Puar, Chow, and Koshy are interested in how “*the ethnic* aids the project of whiteness,” or how the assimilation and integration of certain, ideal minorities are held up as success stories, reifying by denying white privilege—often in contradistinction to an unassimilable “black” example.¹² Their work helps to unpack how discourses of multicultural tolerance absorb specific racial others to distance and oppress the confluence of race and class elsewhere. Somewhat differently from them, in what follows I am less interested in how an Arab “ethnic” aids racist and classist neoliberal power, though this is a valuable political exercise. For the moment, however, I instead want to ask: Can *blackness* aid the project of whiteness?¹³ By this I am not connecting actual African American individuals or experiences to the perpetuation of racial inequality and neo-imperialism in the Middle East. Rather, I am asking how liberal discourses about

Arab and Muslim others mobilize *ideas of* “black”ness in order to assimilate some Arab figures and eject others.

If “blackness” can “aid the project of whiteness,”¹⁴ how does it do so, and at whose expense? Allusions to blackness that are mobilized to frame and understand the figures of both the Arab protester and the terrorist-thug resonate on a racial spectrum that works to make familiar an Arab other that is otherwise irredeemably strange. Building on Timothy Mitchell’s work, the mobilization of ideas of blackness to understand Arab subjects and their politics is an example of a “carefully chaotic” curation of Arab subjectivity for a non-Arab audience.¹⁵ These mobilizations of blackness in both positive and negative representations of Arab and Muslim others come to act as “one of multiple sites at which racial formation takes place,” one which furthermore highlights a “dialectical relationship between blackness, whiteness,” and Arabness.¹⁶

What political narratives does mobilizing blackness in this way serve? Blackwashed representations of Arab and Muslim actors depoliticize exciting and threatening Arab Others while simultaneously whitewashing US and European history, scrubbing the latter of elements of negative racial oppression (retaining only the sense of victory over injustice) and purging racial struggle of its class conflict and economic materiality. In other words, whitewashing and blackwashing are both neoliberal discursive and representational strategies that make figures familiar or strange and, in so doing, incorporate or distance them from what we might call, following Susan Koshy, a “refurbished American Dream.” And here, “American Dream” only means an idealized neoliberal trajectory of political progression and economic development, to which the US, as the most politically “mature” and economically “sound” of the leaders of the “free world,” has already arrived.

Moreover, blackwashing in negative representations—when the terrorist is rendered as former rapper/thug—offer important counter examples to the positive celebrations of protesters as hip hop artists in the early weeks and months of the Arab Spring. For example, in 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s campaign for re-election ran an ad suggesting the Israeli left would surrender to terrorism. The “terrorists” in the ad, flying the flag of the misnamed “Islamic State,” bobbed their heads to Arabic rap.¹⁷ Or consider that, in 2014, the Lebanese rapper Double A the Preacherman was arrested in the southern suburbs of Beirut on the accusation that his baggy pants and beard made him look like a Salafist in a neighborhood reeling from a slew of suicide bombings.¹⁸ Or, we might examine the press coverage that excitedly reported that the notorious IS fighter known in the English media as “Jihadi John”—the individual that the US considers responsible for the execution of US journalist James Foley—was a rapper in the UK before leaving to join the caliphate.¹⁹ In similar reporting, Billboard and CNN, among other news sources, even warn about the emergence of a new subgenre, “jihadi rap” used as a recruiting tool for groups like IS and Al Qaeda. The efficacy of “jihadi rap,” explains Billboard, is rooted in an affinity for “gangsta rap” and has to be understood as a “counterculture.”²⁰ Both the illogic of IS—a self modeled, ultra-conservative, Islamist organization—earnestly using music to recruit fighters in Europe or the US, and the extremely poor quality of the music are brushed aside in order to manufacture the narrative of the existence of “jihadi rap” as an actually threatening recruiting strategy. Titles like “Nine Disturbingly Good Jihadi Raps,” (in *Foreign Policy*) and “The Terrorist Recruiting Crossroads: Where Jihad Meets Rap” (by CNN) or Politico’s “Al Qaeda’s New Front: Jihadi Rap,” communicate the threat “jihadi rap” poses with very little analysis of the reach, production, or supposed efficacy of the tracks in question.²¹

We thus find ourselves in a political environment where media outlets all but fall over themselves to celebrate hip hop in the Arab street as non-violent speaking truth to power,

while simultaneously framing rap as the insidious soundtrack to terrorism and the Muslim rapper as terrorist (and terrorist as rap-inclined thug). In such an environment, how should we critically understand the racial imaginations that mobilize urban “black” as an intermediary towards understanding “Arab” or “Muslim”? How do these mobilizations of “blackness” aid the production and ascendancy of “whiteness”—of multicultural, neoliberal, War-on-Terror-fighting norms?

I am arguing that a certain kind of orientalism with neoliberal characteristics depoliticizes by liberalizing Arab objects of representation and their expression. One of its strategies for doing so is “blackwashing”—evoking notions of blackness as shorthand for approaching and understanding the Arab Other. These racial imaginaries used in representative schemas of Arab youth are especially salient because of the ability of these ideas of blackness to depoliticize whether the Arab subject is, to adapt Mahmoud Mamdani’s formulation a “good rapper” or a “bad rapper.”²² That is, this racialized imagination “obtains whether the other is perceived with dread or with desire.”²³ The liberal celebrations of the Arab Spring and the expression that accompanied it are intimately linked to the more straight-forward racism of the discourses of the War on Terrorism. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin.

In the remainder of this article I first identify in more detail how representations of the “good rapper” work. Following this, I turn to the more “negative” representations to trace the formation and production of the “bad rapper” as terrorist-thug. My explorations here lean on a trajectory of work furthering Edward Said’s postulations about how orientalism codifies and controls the oriental Other.²⁴ By tracing representations of the “good rapper,” I consider the “gentler” orientalism of positive representations, where exotic allure is coupled with strange familiarity. Then, in tracking the construction of the “bad rapper” as terrorist-thug, I am concerned with how this gentler orientalism is parcel to the more violent racism of Islamophobia. Finally, in the conclusion to the piece, I consider a musical example of building racial imaginations between “white,” “black,” and “Arab” that does not rely on the neoliberal blackwashing I work to unpack here.

My exploration of how the figure of the “good rapper” functions politically is encouraged by Eng-Beng Lim’s recent critiques of how celebrations of culture in post-colonial contexts can depoliticize Asian subjects. His identification of representations of exotic familiarity that tease and comfort a “Western gaze that cannot help trolling the world for the signs” of alternative culture “while expressing incredulity at what similarities can be found” is central to my own arguments about how hip hop has been mobilized as a lens through which to access Arab subjects.²⁵ That is, Lim’s attention to how liberal economic policy, but also art criticism, academic study, and activism may re-inscribe “stereotypes even where they don’t apply in order for the critique to make sense to a western audience”²⁶ encourages careful, critical attention to the racial representations that make Arab Others “readable” to specific audiences. This requires consideration even if the intention behind those representations is offered in a spirit of enthusiasm or solidarity.

In parsing out how the “bad rapper” is constructed and how this figure depoliticizes Arab and Muslim subjects, my postulations have been grounded by Jasbir Puar’s work on how progressive, liberal, feminist, and queer discourses have furthered the very Islamophobia and exoticism they pretend to deplore. Puar suggests that racialized representations of the terrorist Other as essentially sexualized, repressed, or hopelessly religious dispense with the need to consider the material catalysts of “terrorist” acts.²⁷ My suggestion here is to consider how these racial ideas are constructed—specifically what political narratives give these figures meaning and attraction—in order to parse out more completely how they depoliticize.

This builds on Steven Salaita's recognition that anti-Arab racism has long relied on anti-Black, anti-Semitic, and anti-Native images and ideas.²⁸ My own point is that the specific formulations of blackness that help evoke the "Freedom Fighter" and the "thug" are additionally, inseparably intertwined with neoliberal political policy and fallout. So, the racialization I am considering is, like Puar's, "a figure for social formations and processes that are not only tied to what has been theorized as race."²⁹ Blackwashing as a strategy of neoliberal orientalism is also recognizing how class and other anti-imperial and anti-capitalist critiques are appropriated, assimilated, or cast out of the neoliberal body politic. I trace this racial imagining projected onto the figure of the Arab rapper, around whom I argue there is a vibrant resonance of fascination as well as assumptions of intelligibility.

"Good Rapper": Bringing Home the Freedom Fighter

In the wake of the Arab Uprisings, US, English, and French media rushed to highlight the new creative expression driving politics and change in Arab cities from Sidi Bouzid to Beirut. Despite a history of hip hop and rap in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) dating at least to the 1980s, the enthusiasm around 2011 for rap and graffiti cast Arab rappers as suddenly emerging onto the stage of global hip hop. For example, in that year *TIME* magazine named the Tunisian rapper El Général—briefly imprisoned for his track "Rais Lebled," which criticized the regime of then president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali—one of the top ten most influential people of that year. The profile of El Général (Hamada Ben Amor, aged 21 at the time) on *TIME*'s website described him as a "rap star whose song 'Rais Lebled' is credited with helping inspire the uprising in his country... The song, which includes blunt allegations of government corruption, also became the anthem of protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square."³⁰

A number of things jump out in this description. First, the rapper's age is foregrounded (literally the first thing in his description after his name), illustrating the necessary connection in the appeal of rap in this region with what Ted Swedenburg has described as the Middle East's "imagined youths."³¹ While the other profiles in "*TIME*'s 100" also include the ages of individuals, that detail is woven in with descriptions of the individual's work and impact. The second notable feature of El Général's profile is its explanation of the political impact of the single song: "blunt allegations of government corruption." Corruption in Ben Ali's regime, despite enjoying consistent European and US support in the decades leading up to the revolution, is cast as an obvious foe to the young Tunisian rapper, who, with a song, can inspire revolution.³² This connection of musical or creative expression to political mobilization fundamentally misunderstands (or deliberately sidelines) the political work that led up to the Tunisian revolution. Years of labor organizing and political mobilization are equated with or replaced by a single song.

The profile also suggests the song became "an anthem of protesters in Cairo." This connection is important for how it links the Tunisian political struggle with the Egyptian revolution which followed it and which much more completely captured imaginations in and outside of the Arab world.³³ Part of El Général's impact and the reason for his appearance on *TIME*'s list is thus described as what he was able to transfer to Egypt from Tunisia. Of course, the idea that the "Arab Spring" awakened a sleeping Arab populace across a dozen countries was an integral part of the romance and enthusiasm that captured global imaginations. In the Arab world, it ignited superficial ideas of pan-Arabism (I say superficial because the uprisings were never connected as a single, regional movement—either ideologically or materially.) In English-language media, the notion that the Arab Spring was contagious, spreading from one country to another, permitted the collapse in discourse and analyses (even sympathetic ones) of political and economic causes and other differences, and allowed for the creation of the figure of a generic "Arab protester." Around this figure, contextual differences could be elided (and material,

economic realities and their causes often ignored) in order to construct a singular freedom fighter with one concern: the ousting of a singularly despotic, oriental leader. El Général's profile and the description of his influence thus depends on a sequence of abbreviations that build an idea of Arab youth protest that is not very deeply tied to political reality.

If the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan, Yemeni, and Syrian political struggles were collapsed into a single, celebrated figure of the young "Arab protester," that protester was outfitted with a set of "freedom"-ready tools and expression. One of these tools was hip hop. Another was social media. While the BBC asked if hip hop was driving the Arab Spring one day, other outlets on other days debated the role of social media in the uprisings. Dozens of articles appeared asking, "The First Twitter Revolution?" and "Does Egypt Need Twitter?" substituting social media for hip hop as causative agent for the protests.³⁴ Importantly, these articles tended to acknowledge that "not all the credit" can go to Twitter or hip hop, while simultaneously painting pictures of media-savvy, poetically inclined, Tupac-listening young people as the new "Arab Street." This coverage repeats orientalist assumptions about the belated onset of Arab "modernity" while it ignores the diverse demographic make-up of Arab cities. It is only in contrast to the persistent orientalist ideas of Arabs as desperately violent and "their" politics as hopelessly chaotic and undemocratic that the image of a fully-globalized, Arab youth rhythmically protesting with a microphone can retain so fully the enthusiasm bestowed on rap in Arabic in the wake of the Uprisings. The Arab rapper "speaking truth to power" is an exciting, suddenly modern figure when imagined as emerging from out of the dust, backwardness, and oppression that is otherwise understood to characterize the Middle East and its politics. I am identifying this as problematic while questioning the ways in which "blackness," as attached to hip hop, helps to structure these ideas of modernity, progress, and political change.³⁵

The celebration of the Arab Uprisings in the Western media belied the woefully widespread ignorance about the actual political and economic grievances of the denizens of the MENA, while perpetuating the most basic stereotypes of "eastern" political structures. The initially wholehearted support for these spontaneous revolutions against cartoonishly corrupt leaders failed to acknowledge the US and Europe's very active role in supporting and maintaining these regimes and decades of their policies of dispensing with democratic dissent.³⁶ Moreover, the idea that the revolutions were made possible by Twitter, Facebook, or hip hop deliberately sidelined the histories of labor organizing in countries like Tunisia and Egypt while giving short shrift to the neoliberal economic policies imposed on these countries over the course of the past three decades.³⁷ These narratives additionally accorded agency to Western technological tools, perpetuating the idea that Arab subjects were too simple or chaotic to have coordinated something on the scale of these revolutions on their own. Assertions like, "hip hop has become synonymous with *thawra* [revolution]... Arabian rappers are send[ing] an important message: Throw up your hands for peace!" irredeemably conflate revolution, "peace," and political critique as if they were all synonymous.³⁸

Moreover, even when this coverage sites its conscious awareness of the limitations of the application of its analysis, it occludes a materialist, political exploration of the causes, catalysts, and agents in the protests. Cordelia Hebblethwaite writing for the BBC suggests for example that the affinity for "blunt-speaking" in hip hop, "made it particularly difficult for musicians in many tightly-controlled Arab states to express themselves."³⁹ Hebblethwaite opposes hip hop's essence to that of despotic Arab rulers. That is, it is not specific policies of imprisoning, torturing, and otherwise systematically discouraging dissent (with the express encouragement of US and European aid, often military, no less) that makes it difficult for musicians to "express themselves." It is that hip hop's freedom-

embracing bluntness is naturally opposed to the essence of Arab society and political development. That is why “until now, hip hop and rap have only had a limited reach within the Middle East and North Africa.”⁴⁰ Moreover, the apparent spread of hip hop across this region is proof of the political changes at hand: “in recent months, hip hop appears to be gaining momentum rapidly in many Arab Spring countries.”⁴¹

Why was this kind of coverage attractive? The enthusiasm to attach rap to protest is not only a question of quick journalism that has not done its homework. The number of stories relating causation between rap and protest in the Arab world speaks to an idea evidently shared among editors that this representative framework of Arab youth would both appeal to readers and allow for a sensitive, sympathetic portrayal of the uprisings. That this shorthand of Arab protester as rapper emerged at a moment when the vast majority of political pundits and politicians outside the Arab world were completely caught off guard by the protests actually makes this media content an important example of the ways in which liberal discourse functions, and the racial imaginaries upon which it relies. Ultimately, the coverage of rap during the Arab Spring tells us much more about the audience it hoped to reach than the subjects it supposedly covered.

The depoliticization of expressions of Arab and Muslim youth that I identify here is achieved as part of what Jasbir Puar has called a “theory of proximity,” not a “rhetoric... of difference.”⁴² That is, efforts to understand especially the paradigm-shifting events of the Arab Uprisings through the lens of hip hop can be seen as attempts to transform cultural, economic, and political difference into familiarity. By casting the Arab protester as a familiar figure, creatively and nonviolently “speaking truth to power,” media narratives converted the chaotic unknown (and incidentally, the occasional real violence) of Cairo and Tunis’s street protests into an exciting but controlled iteration of liberal political change.

Puar tells us that terrorism is evaluated through theories of proximity, allowing for “familiarity and complicity.” My suggestion is that the Arab Uprisings were also analyzed, framed, and understood by relying on “familiarity and complicity.” Puar writes,

It is not through the rhetoric of externality, of difference—cultural, economic, political, religious, psychological, or otherwise—that terrorism must be evaluated; what is needed is a theory of proximity that allows at once for both specificity and interiority, the interiority of familiarity and complicity.⁴³

It is not only terrorism that needs to be made familiar. The massive upheavals on the streets of Arab countries also threatened to challenge the *pax Americana* that had supported despotism and inequality at the expense of the development of healthy democratic debate. Elsewhere, media pundits worried about the rise of political Islam in moderate groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. But in lieu of understanding moderate iterations of political Islam as the result of democratic processes and decades of political repression, much liberal media opted to celebrate the uprisings as part of a trajectory of always-lagging Arab modernity: this was the Arab ’68, and the legacy of the US civil rights movement, and hip hop’s speaking truth to power could be mobilized to render these protest movements familiar.

Rendering political change familiar is another way of saying it is recast “for an audience who can only see through a Western lens.”⁴⁴ Eng-Beng Lim tells us that this discourse is “generated through or against the gaze of the straight white male and his mythic... other.”⁴⁵ The “other” in this case is *both* “Arab” and “black,” against whom all possible political adversaries are conceived. Contemporary politics are, on the one hand, cast against the backdrop of the Arab and Muslim Other in the War on Terror, while on the

other hand, politics are conceived of historically against the backdrop of the black Other in the assumed-to-be-eclipsed struggles for civil rights and the War on Drugs. That is, the struggles of black populations for equal rights are folded into “post-racial” societies as a remnant of a proud, storied past, not a turbulent present.

Through examples of media coverage of the presence of hip hop in the Arab spring I have attempted in this section to complement Aidi’s work on the blackwashing of American history abroad with a consideration of how neoliberal media attempted to make the Arab protestor familiar by relying on similarly blackwashed notions of progressive trajectories for democratic politics. The attempts to draw connections between Arab rappers and an essence of American hip hop blackwash Arab rappers and Arab politics by superficially aligning them with (thoroughly whitewashed) goals and strategies of some civil rights expression (a “revolution” where you “throw your hands up for peace”). At the same time, blackwashing also takes the form of representations of terrorists and potential terrorists as “thugs” or rappers. Media attention to the affinity for rapping of mercenaries of the so-called Islamic State conjured the urban “thug” as predecessor of IS terrorist.

“Bad Rapper”: Casting the Terrorist-Thug

Fast-forward from the hey days of the Arab Uprisings to Benjamin Netanyahu’s 2015 reelection campaign. One of the last particularly racist forays launched by the incumbent Israeli president and his Likud party in that term was a TV advertisement released in March 2015. The main aim of the ad sought to scare Israelis into voting for Likud by linking the Israeli Left to terrorism. In the ad, which has since been removed from the internet, a white truck flying the iconic IS flag pulls up next to another car on a desert highway. Bearded fighters stand manning RPGs on the bed of the truck. Inside, they bob their heads gravely to loud music. In Hebrew, through comically thick Arabic accents, the men roll down their windows to ask the next car, “Which way to Jerusalem?” The response comes, “Take a left.” The IS truck swerves off to the left. Text punctuated with bullet sounds and bullet marks flashes across the screen, reading: “The Left will surrender to terror.”⁴⁶

The music blaring from the IS truck throughout the ad is part of the song “*Ghorbah*” [Estrangement] by the Amman-based Palestinian hip hop group Torabyeh.⁴⁷ There are legal proceedings underway regarding the sampling of the song, which of course does not endorse IS (the song is about growing up in exile and the dream of returning to Palestine).⁴⁸ But what is revealing is how the Arabic rap music paradoxically assists the construction of an Islamophobic image of an existential political threat. Under the beards, the IS flag, Arabic accents, and RPGs affixed to the truck, the rap music (which would be scorned by Islamist extremists, one should think) nonetheless adds to the “thuggishness” of the terrorists, who bob to the beat in an imitation of street-hardened confidence. The Israeli political campaign ad clearly constructs caricatures of Arab terrorists. But its construction of those terrorists relies in part on much-circulated caricatures of black gangsters and “gangsta rap,” however incompatible these traits are with the fundamentalist religious practices they are meant to evoke.

Similar racialization occurred in stories about rap and IS in 2014 in the wake of the beheading of American journalist James Foley. The video of the beheading was the first of several to purportedly feature an IS commando by the name of “Jihadi John” (since identified as Mohamed Emwazi, reportedly killed in a US airstrike on November 12, 2015). In the rush to identify the killer, the British *Sunday Times* identified a rapper “L Jinny” as the disgruntled youth behind the executions. It turns out that Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary, the rapper who used the name L Jinny, was not “Jihadi John” but an associate of Mohamed Emwazi (and who is at time of writing currently on the run from both IS and the UK.)⁴⁹ In

another example, reports about German national Denis Cuspert who converted to Islam and joined IS similarly focused on his former life as “rapper” Deso Dogg.⁵⁰

This reporting emphasizes the very drastic shift from rapper to IS fighter in these individual’s lives at the same time that it underscores criminal and anti-social tendencies the individual always possessed, manifest in their affinity for rap music. Press on Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary emphasizes how his rap lyrics “provide chilling clues” to the disgruntled Londoner’s “rage.”⁵¹ Like the Netanyahu campaign ad, this emphasis on past or private lives rapping points to an inherent “thugness” that is meant to evoke images of urban danger. The fact that this coverage can do this while simultaneously emphasizing the surprising transformation from lyricist to executioner points to the ambiguous tension with which positive and negative imagined connotations of the Muslim rapper can be held.

In both the Netanyahu ad and the coverage of the former rappers turned IS fighters, racialized representations of urban gangsters help to estrange the Muslim terrorist as antithetical to Israeli and European society. The notion that the terrorist is or was formerly a thug coaxes a racist imaginary taught to fear black sociality as violent into similar feelings towards the fundamentalist Muslim threat (and vice versa). Netanyahu’s campaign ad and its incorporation of Arabic rap is a stunningly clear example of just how neatly the slide from thug to terrorist can be mobilized and just how quickly the freedom-fighting hip hop head can be flipped into a menacing terrorist threat. These examples illustrate how specifically neoliberal racializations—evoked by the realities of the dangerous, urban gangster have bled through from the “War on Drugs” to the “War on Terror.” Thus, these constructions of “blackness,” “whiteness,” and “Arabness” are not abstract racial essences that exist somewhere in the world, but timely political racializations that specifically build on recent histories of militarization, securitization, and ghettoization. In connecting the obvious Islamophobia that casts the terrorist as thug with the gentler orientalism that celebrates the arrival of hip hop to the “Arab Street,” we can see how neoliberal policy and discourse whitewashes and blackwashes to its own benefit. The attractiveness or unattractiveness of representative frameworks that mobilize specific ideas of blackness as a way of understanding politics in a turbulent Middle East are specific shorthand that builds on the very devastating histories of neoliberal failure (the War on Drugs) to maintain a neoliberal present (the War on Terror) and prepare for a neoliberal future that is both racially and economically divided. Considerations of black-Arab solidarity, especially in times of protest, uprising, and the ubiquitous manufacturing of security “threats,” must insist on the specificity of affinity in racial oppression and racial struggle to avoid perpetuating imagined neoliberal racial proximity that strips the politics and material realities from anti-racist, anti-imperial, and anti-capitalist struggle. To conclude this essay on a more positive note, I move away from the limiting representations of “white,” “black,” and “Arab” mobilized in the representations of Arab and Muslim subjects I have considered above. I examine one alternative triangulation of “whiteness,” “blackness,” and “Arabness” and the political implications therein.

“How much can one be black under the rule of rich and white?”

I opened this essay by suggesting that the trailer to *Slingshot Hip Hop* presented an abstracted but attractive framework for understanding the experiences of Palestinians living in Israel. If, as I have argued here, this racialized framework deserves some critique, it is not to ignore or disavow the reality of racial discrimination under the Israeli Occupation. My argument has been that racial relationships and accompanying power dynamics are always invoked in specific ways, playing consciously or unconsciously on

particular understandings of “black,” “white,” and “Arab” that have political resonances. In Nafar’s formulation in *Slingshot Hip Hop*, the Palestinians are like black Americans, the Zionists like white Americans, with the attendant resonances of oppressor and oppressed. This is a particular formulation of race and politics that offers and delimits political possibilities. The shorthand towards the racial dialectic in *Slingshot* is geared to a specific audience: a young, liberal one outside of the Arab world, to whom the film communicates that Palestinians are not all fundamentalist “terrorists,” that they are young people who read, work, play, and like rap music, among other things.

But we might remember that this racial dialectic is not the only way in which race relations or “blackness” and “whiteness” and “Arabness” may be mobilized, analyzed, or mined for political frameworks, especially perhaps in contemporary Israel. I bring my thoughts on blackwashing and representing Arabs and politics here to a close with a consideration of other ways to articulate the relationship between “whiteness,” “blackness,” and “Arabness” using as an example Jowan Safadi’s “To Be an Arab.” Safadi is an independent Palestinian musician living in Haifa. His work borders pop, electronic, and alt-rock, and is sung in a mixture of Arabic and Hebrew. Like DAM, he is a ’48 Palestinian (living inside Israel) and his work occasionally considers the experiences of Arabs in Israel.



Caption: Jowan Safadi’s “To Be an Arab,” released August 11, 2015.

His 2015 track “To Be an Arab” is an especially powerful examination of racism in Israel. The piece invokes race relations between black, white, and Arab but does so without mobilizing the stereotypical ideas of blackness through hip hop or gangsta rap that I have discussed here. Sung mostly in Hebrew, the piece is directed at an imagined Mizrahi or Sephardic “Arabophobe.” The lyrics read:

Hardcore homophobes are the most gay on the inside
Mizrahi Arabophobes are Arabs themselves
Who are just afraid
And prefer to stay in the closet
Because they know, they know best
That to be an Arab is not that great
It’s hard to be an Arab
It’s really hard, ask me
It’s hard to be an Arab
How much can one be black
Under the rule of the rich and white

In the racist state...?

Sephardim or Mizrahi, once they two were Arabs

They changed their names to change their destiny

Because they know, they know best

They know better than anyone

They paid the bloody price

They learned it on their skin

It's hard to be an Arab

It's really hard, ask me

It's hard to be an Arab

How much can one be black

Under the rule of the rich and white

In the racist state?

In Arabic:

Listen to me, dude

You need to know where you came from

And where you're going to

And what you're going to find here

Standing in the streets chanting: 'Death to Arabs!' and such shit

You're an Arab, man, more fucked than I am.

Back to Hebrew:

Hey, you imported Arab

Take it from a local Arab

You were dragged here

To take my place

It's hard to be an Arab

It's really hard, ask me

It's hard to be an Arab

How much can one be black

Under the rule of the rich and white

In the land.... Of Palestine

In the video, Safadi, flanked by dancing girls and smoking a water pipe in a car parked on a beach, sings to the imagined "Arabophobe," who we see dressing for a Zionist march. As Safadi sings "Hardcore homophobes are the most gay on the inside/ Mizrahi Arabophobes are Arabs themselves/ Who are just afraid," the Arabophobe dons a black t-shirt sporting

the logo of Lehava, a far-right Jewish political organization, and draws a serious star of David onto each cheek. Fully dressed, we see the Arabophobe arrive on the beach where Safadi sits in the car, singing. Accompanied by men with clubs, the Arabophobe threatens Safadi, who gets out of the car to respond to the assaults by addressing him coolly in Arabic. By the end of his confiding in the Arabophobe (“Listen to me, dude/ You need to know where you came from/ And where you’re going to... Standing in the streets chanting: ‘Death to Arabs!’ and such shit...You’re an Arab, man, more fucked than I am”) the two have seemingly come to understand each other. Consequently, the entourage of both the Arabophobe and Safadi erupt in a mixed dance party, replete with ululations. Meanwhile, a “white” couple passing the party on the beach dressed in fitness spandex, shake their head at the ethnic spectacle as they jog by. At this point, Safadi ends the refrain “How much can one be black/ Under the rule of the rich and white/ In the racist state—” with the rejoinder “of Palestine.” With this, the Arabophobe startles and appears to want to threaten Safadi again as the screen fades to black.

The playing on racial identities here is particular to the Zionist context of Israeli emigration and discrimination. In identifying the racism he lives in Israel, Safadi casts a racialized triangle between Ashkenazi (European) Jews, Mizrahi and Sephardic (Arab and North African) Jews, and Arabs in Israel. “How much can one be black under the rule of rich and white?” highlights the spectrum of racial differentiation and discrimination in contemporary Israel without casting the Palestinian “as” the only “black” and the Zionist “as white” and without positioning black on the spectrum of neoliberal familiarity I have worked to identify above. Instead, Safadi deliberately highlights the particular hierarchies between “whiteness,” “blackness,” and “Arab” that structure Israeli society. His triangulation plays on notions of indigeneity as well as race (“Hey you imported Arab/ Take it from a local Arab”) all while pushing on possibilities for some Jewish-Arab affinity “under the rule of rich and white.”⁵² Here the intersectional study explored is not between Arabs and blacks, or the experiences of either’s oppression in comparison to the other. Rather, Safadi draws a constellation of racial oppression along a spectrum of racist “blackness” that applies to both Arabs and Mizrahi Jews inside white supremacist Israel. At the same time, the construction of this smoking, dancing, hot-headed, “Arab/black/Mizrahi” ethnicity against the “fit” and “healthy” “white” one weaves a class critique into his denouncement of racism in Israel. “Under the rule of rich and white” in historic Palestine estranges both the Arab and the non-European Jew. But this racism has none of the trappings of recognizable politics mobilized in Netanyahu’s ad or media celebrations of hip hop freedom fighters. Safadi’s track, an intelligent, witty deconstruction of Zionist racism and Jewish racial construction works not by restaging stereotypes of “blackness,” “whiteness,” and “Arabness” but by constructing them in relation to each other in a way particular to the Israeli context. Such a construction illuminates the complex racial dynamics of Zionist occupation and settler colonialism without blackwashing.

In this article I have attempted to draw attention to the ways in which some liberal discourses have mobilized racial imaginations in order to make familiar or make strange specific Arab subjects. Following examples of discussion of rap and hip hop in neoliberal media around political developments in the Arab world like the Palestinian intifadas, the “Arab Spring,” and the rise of the “Islamic State” illuminate ways in which both progressive and conservative discourses mobilize specific dialectical constructions of “whiteness,” “blackness,” and “Arabness” to depoliticize both Arab and Muslim agents and histories of anti-racist struggle and expression.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. See for example, Lila Abu Lughod and Maya Mikdashi, "Tradition and the Anti-Politics Machine: DAM Seduced by the 'Honor Crime,'" *Jadaliyya*, November 23, 2012, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8578/tradition-and-the-anti-politics-machine-dam-seduce>. ↗
2. See for example, Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Sunaina Maira, *Jil Oslo: Palestinian Hip Hop, Youth Culture, and the Youth Movement* (Washington, DC: Tadween Publishing, 2013). ↗
3. Cordelia Hebblethwaite, "Is Hip Hop Driving the Arab Spring?," *BBC News*, July 24, 2011, accessed November 1, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14146243>; and Michel Martin, "Tupac Encouraged the Arab Spring," *NPR*, March 20, 2013, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/20/174839318/tupac-encouraged-the-arab-spring>. ↗
4. Hisham Aidi, *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014). ↗
5. I explore other examples of blackwashing at BAM elsewhere. See Rayya El Zein, "Call and Response, Radical Belonging, and Arabic Hip-Hop in 'the West,'" in *American Studies Encounters the Middle East*, eds. Marwan Kraidy and Alex Lubin (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 104-134. ↗
6. Moustafa Bayoumi, "The Race Is On: Muslims and Arabs in the American Imagination," *Middle East Report*, March 2010, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/race>. ↗
7. Quoted in Patrick Sisson, "The Message: Can Hip Hop Diplomacy Help Fix America's Tarnished Image Abroad?" April 2008, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://patricksisson.com/the-message-can-better-hip-hop-diplomacy-help-fix-america's-tarnished-image-abroad/>. ↗
8. Ibid. Included in *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco* press packet. ↗
9. Of course this "cultural diplomacy" and its appropriation of African American musical experimentation is not new. Hisham Aidi explains how "hip hop diplomacy" is an extension of the "jazz ambassadors" program sponsored by the Eisenhower administrations during the Cold War; Aidi, *Rebel Music*. On the Jazz Ambassadors program see Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). ↗
10. On "whiteness" in cultural studies see, among many others, Shelley fisher Fishkin, "Interrogating 'Whiteness,' Complicating 'Blackness': Remapping American Culture," *American Quarterly* 47 (1995): 428-466. I use "blackness" as the assumed counterpoint to "whiteness" the way Susan Koshy does—to deconstruct the binary of racial affinity and difference between "white" and "black." While she interrogates how this binary can be deconstructed by analyzing how an "Asian" intermediary navigates this binary, I am asking how blackness is used to approximate "Asian," here rendered as "Arab," for a neoliberal audience. See Susan Koshy, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness," *boundary 2* 28, no. 1 (2001): 153-194. ↗
11. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in*

Contemporary Cultural Studies (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Koshy, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity." ↗

12. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 31, emphasis added. ↗
13. I use "blackness," "whiteness," and "Arabness" in the vein of critical anti-racism scholarship that marks ideas about race, racialized others, and power. These terms do not invoke actual racial characteristics like skin color. ↗
14. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 31. ↗
15. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1. ↗
16. I am adapting Susan Koshy's phrase here. Koshy is interested in "the dialectical relationship between blackness, whiteness, and Asianness." Koshy, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity," 174. ↗
17. Nick Robins-Early, "Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is Getting Sued by a Jordanian Rapper," *The Huffington Post*, February 18, 2015, accessed April 19, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/18/jordanian-rapper-netanyahu_n_6707094.html. ↗
18. Marc Daou, "Lebanese 'Funk-Hop' Artist Mistaken for Terrorism," *France 24*, January 23, 2014, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.france24.com/en/20140123-lebanese-funk-hop-artist-mistaken-terrorist-hussein-charafeddine-beirut>. ↗
19. Staff, "Former British Rapper Reportedly Under Investigation for James Foley Beheading," *Billboard*, August 23, 2014, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6229155/abdel-majed-abdel-bary-james-foley-beheading-l-jinny-british-rapper>. ↗
20. Richard Smirke, "Jihadi Rap: Understanding the Subculture," *Billboard*, October 10, 2014, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6273809/jihadi-rap-l-jinny-abdel-majed-abdel-bary>. ↗
21. J. Dana Stuster, "9 Disturbingly Good Jihadi Raps," *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2013, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/9-disturbingly-good-jihadi-raps/>; Ed Payne and Jason Carroll, "The Terrorist Recruiting Crossroads: Where Jihad Meets Rap," *CNN*, January 14, 2015, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/13/us/jihadi-rap/>; and Amil Khan, "Al Qaeda's New Front: Jihadi Rap," *POLITICO*, August 31, 2014, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/08/al-qaedas-new-front-jihadi-rap-110481>. ↗
22. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Doubleday, 2005). ↗
23. Joseph Boone, "Vacation Cruises; Or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism," *PMLA* 110 (1995): 90. ↗
24. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1977). ↗
25. Eng-Beng Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performance in the Asias* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 121. ↗
26. Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens*, 184. ↗
27. Puar writes about the Federal Research Division's research into terrorism: "Although Osama bin Laden is hailed as the 'prototype of a new breed of terrorist—the private entrepreneur who puts modern enterprise at the service of a global terrorist network,' religion—not politics, not economics—is figured as the reason behind terrorist activity," Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 55. ↗

28. Steven Salaita, "Beyond Orientalism and Islamophobia: 9/11, Anti-Arab Racism, and the Mythos of National Pride," *Centennial Review* 10 (2006): 245-266; and Steven Salaita, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2006). [↗](#)
29. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xii. [↗](#)
30. No author, "The 2011 TIME 100," *TIME*, accessed November 1, 2014, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2066367_2066369_2066242,00.html. [↗](#)
31. Ted Swedenburg, "Imagined Youths," *Middle East Report* 36 (2007), accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer245/imagined-youths>. [↗](#)
32. See Nouri Gana, ed., *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution: Contexts, Architects, Prospects* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013). [↗](#)
33. Timothy Mitchell explores the role Egypt plays in Western imagination in *Colonising Egypt*. [↗](#)
34. Ethan Zuckerman, "The First Twitter Revolution?" *Foreign Policy*, January 15, 2011, accessed November 25, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/15/the-first-twitter-revolution-2/>; and Malcom Gladwell, "Does Egypt Need Twitter?" *The New Yorker*, February 2, 2011, accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/does-egypt-need-twitter>. [↗](#)
35. Ethnomusicologist Timothy Taylor explores how blackness can be "subsumed into a larger category of 'western' or 'modern.'" Timothy Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 155. [↗](#)
36. See among others Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, translated by Geoffrey Michael Goshgarian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). [↗](#)
37. See among others: Bassam Haddad, "The Role of Workers and Labor Unions in the Egyptian Revolution," April 9, 2011, accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1202/the-role-of-workers-and-labor-unions-in-the-egypti>. [↗](#)
38. Amber Leon, "'Arab Spring' Draws Inspiration from American Hip-Hop," *The Grio - MSNBC*, September 15, 2011, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://thegrio.com/2011/09/15/hip-hop-inspires-arab-freedom-fighters-1/>. [↗](#)
39. Hebblethwaite, "Is Hip Hop Driving the Arab Spring?" [↗](#)
40. Ibid. [↗](#)
41. Ibid. [↗](#)
42. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 61. [↗](#)
43. Ibid. [↗](#)
44. Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens*, 184. [↗](#)
45. Ibid., 188. [↗](#)
46. Hebrew translations quoted in Lisa Goldman, "Netanyahu Campaign Video: A Victory for the Left Means an ISIS Invasion," *+972 Magazine*, February 15, 2015, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://972mag.com/netanyahu-campaign-video-a-victory-for-the-left-means-an-isis-invasion/102703/>. [↗](#)
47. "Torabyeh - Gorbah ft. Husam Abed," YouTube video, 4:57, posted by "Torabyeh," February 13, 2012, accessed April 7, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zGnGeiMun8#t=73>. [↗](#)

48. Nick Robins-Early, "Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is Getting Sued by a Jordanian Rapper," *The Huffington Post*, February 18, 2015, accessed April 7, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/18/jordanian-rapper-netanyah_n_6707094.html. ↗
49. Huffington Post UK, "British Hip Hop Jihadist Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary Poses In Syria With Severed Head," *The Huffington Post*, August 14, 2014, accessed November 19, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/08/14/british-hip-hop-jihadist-abdel-majed-abdel-bary-syria-severed-head_n_5677555.html; Debra Killalea, "'Jihad John': Rap Song Lyrics Provide Chilling Clues into His Rage," *News.com.au*, September 3, 2014, accessed November 15, 2015, <http://www.news.com.au/world/middle-east/jihad-john-rap-song-lyrics-provide-chilling-clues-into-his-rage/news-story/4192d19f7006713cb91eb02a48a1f3a2>; Jose Lynch, "Jihadi John Reportedly Identified – He's Not A British Rapper," *Billboard*, February 26, 2015, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6487303/jihadi-john-not-british-rapper>. ↗
50. See Jack Crone, "German Rapper-Turned ISIS Extremist Who Starred in Sick Beheading Video 'was Married to FBI Agent,'" *The Daily Mail*, February 16, 2015, accessed November 19, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2956077/German-rapper-turned-ISIS-extremist-starred-sick-beheading-video-spiid-FBI-WIFE.html>; Paul Cruickshank, "German Rapper who Joined ISIS killed in U.S. Strike, Official says," *CNN.com*, October 30, 2015, accessed November 19, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/29/politics/german-isis-rapper-killed-denis-cuspert/>; Benjamin Weinthal, "FBI had Spy in Bedroom of German Rapper turned ISIS Poster Boy, Says Report," *FoxNews.com*, February 16, 2015, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/02/16/fbi-had-spy-in-bedroom-german-rapper-turned-isis-poster-boy-says-report.html>. ↗
51. Debra Killalea, "'Jihad John': Rap Song Lyrics Provide Chilling Clues into His Rage." ↗
52. Importantly, he does this without pushing a liberalized "peace and coexistence" narrative, either. The piece, while it explores racial affinity among Jews and Arabs, is searing in its critique of Zionist Israel. ↗

 Bio



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